

# FACES in the NEW PLAYS and OLD

MRS. FISKE  
IN  
"MIS NELLY OF  
N'ORLEANS"

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THE failure of Ernste Novelli to impress himself on the public of New York may not have been altogether due to the coldness which theatregoers felt toward players who do not act in the vernacular. Novelli's versatility was by way of being rather fatal to him. Americans resent in their actors the ability to do too many different kinds of things. They like to see their artists specialize, although there are of course grades of acting possible to both the comedian and the tragedian. But to act *King Lear* and *Charley's Aunt*—that is to make the art of acting too facile to win the respect of discriminating lovers of the drama. It really seems too easy.

Such versatility has always been a characteristic of the continental rather than our own stage. Marie Geisteringer used to alternate on her earlier visits to this country *Boccaccio* and *Marguerite Gautier*, and it was nothing unusual for her to sing *La Duchesse de Gerolstein* and play *Adrienne Lecouvreur* on successive evenings. She changed without difficulty from Von Suppe to Schiller. There was no objection to this chameleon like genius from our public or rather the public that frequented performances in German at that time. In our own actors, there has been scarcely a detour toward the broadly comic unless it were the occasional tendency to act "The Taming of the Shrew" as a contrast to the heavier plays of the Shakespearean repertory. But the farce of Shakespeare and of Brandon Thomas is different.

The public's disinclination to accept any man or woman in more than one capacity and accord equal acknowledgment of talent has often been observed. It may have been that in both arts they were not equally gifted. Dion Boucicault proved an exception as playwright and actor and so later did William Gillette. Our own George Cohan won his fame almost simultaneously as actor, singer and dancer. To-day there is no representative of such success in two capacities.

Least of all would our public be inclined to accept an actor who hoped to delight it on one night with the humors of such exaggerated farce as "Charley's Aunt" and then thrill it with the sufferings of the demerol *Lear*. Such a repertoire is of course unknown to our own actors and it is probable that even in Europe no such wide range of versatility exists to-day. It is at all events not a quality that appeals to American theatregoers. And their ground is comprehensible enough. The depth of sincerity an audience has a right to demand from any player who would incarnate *Lear* before its eyes can scarcely be expected to exist in the nature of one who enjoys playing the least inspired farce. The mere announcement that such a wide variety of talents exist in one actor is sufficient to create prejudice against him, at least here.

Has voice altogether departed from the field of what Broadway has learned to love as comic opera? Is every other quality that a so-called prima donna, singing actress, or what not may possess, regarded in the office of the manager as more essential than a voice in which to sing the music of an operetta? Blonde curls, slimness, some skill in smart acting and unrelieved audacity—these are the qualifications which to-day seem to be sought before anybody in charge of the production of an operetta knows whether the leading figure has a tone in her throat or not. That is the last matter that seems to count, although the performance is still advertised as "a voice opera."

There is no lack of good voices in this country. There have been even more than usual since the last four years have served to keep so many from trying their fortunes on the foreign stages. But during this period has the managerial contempt for anything like a singing voice in comic opera asserted itself more exultantly than ever. It is indeed the voice that is thought of last in engaging the member of the company who might in accordance with tradition be called the prima donna. It is above all her looks that count. It ought not to be forgotten

that the preservation of a voice on the operatic stage is not easy. It takes training in the use of a light organ to use it eight times a week, which is the routine usually demanded. Six performances in the evening and two at the matinees are the average number. There may be more. It would take an artist to keep a voice with such a strain, not to mention the speaking that is required in operetta. Sari Petras succumbed to this strain after a few weeks. Other artists have struggled against such a condition, but have not been able to escape.

It becomes more and more evident that the whole point of view toward operetta must be changed. Its aim apparently is to be amusing if possible. Then it may be melodious, preferably in the school of syncopation. But of paramount importance is the degree of feminine loveliness which it is possible to reveal. Managerial concern is indeed concentrated on this point. The glorification of feminine beauty is from what one may observe of the first importance. So what in the world is there to cause worry about anything so trivial as a lady's voice? But it is worth while to take time in selecting her eyes, her hair, her figure and her arms from among the many applicants. Then why worry about a voice?

Of course operetta has changed always with its progress from one age to another. Nobody expects the satire of *Mathias and Hildegarde* as they laid it off Offenbach's feet, any more than there is a hope that the exquisite irony of W. S. Gilbert may again be heard in stageland. It is to the glorification of the female form divine that this once irresistible school of musical drama has degenerated—if that be the view of the change. Another phase of this matter is altogether of the present. The dressing of comic operetta choruses has come to possess an additional interest. Either economy on account of the present expense of dress or lack of confidence in the experiment they are about to make has made the investment of the entrepreneurs in these days uncommonly cautious. Indeed the appearance of a new frock in a chorus has come to be noteworthy. Not only is there pleasure now in looking out for the possible new frock, but a certain sentimental interest in it.

The Amateur Comedy Club will give to-morrow night at the Garden Theatre a performance of Frank W. Tuttle's "The Village," in aid of the Wendell Boys Club. Mr. Wendell was an enthusiastic member of the Amateur Comedy Club and its action has a special appropriateness. Evert Jansen Wendell founded the Wendell Boys Club, which is at 235 West Thirty-fifth street, early in 1917.

The lower floors of a house formerly used by the Children's Aid Society as a shelter for homeless boys were re-fitted with club and recreation rooms and the upper floors with sleeping rooms for soldiers and sailors on furlough. In that district are many saloons and places of bad influence and it was felt by Mr. Wendell that an especial effort should be made to provide the boys and younger men of the neighborhood with cheerful, clean surroundings and healthy recreation.

Before the Wendell Club was opened there were gangs of boys and young men hanging about the streets and saloons and as they had no proper place in which to spend their evenings they occupied themselves in all kinds of mischief and badness. Mr. Wendell obtained permission to use the house for club rooms for this gang element. The boys of the district accepted the idea with enthusiasm and organized a self-government club, one

of the former gang leaders as president.

To Mr. Wendell's gratification, the club proved orderly and the 150 members appreciated the privileges of the pool and basketball rooms and shower baths. The influence has had a marked result in the present peace of the neighborhood.

Hundreds of soldiers and sailors have also availed themselves of these privileges, the sixty beds in private rooms and dormitories being occupied by them nightly.

**A MARQUIS BEFORE THE WAR.**

If Henri Lavedan carries out his intention of coming to this country to see Leo Ditrichstein in his remarkable play, "The Marquis de Priola," he will undoubtedly consider himself well rewarded not only by the star's performance but by the artistic production as a whole. Mr. Ditrichstein has cherished the design of appearing in this play ever since he saw it in Paris some fifteen years ago in the early days of its initial run at the Comedie Francaise.

Ever since then the play has remained in the repertory of the Comedie. The present time seemed especially appropriate to Mr. Ditrichstein for an American production of the play on account of the cordial relations of this country and France and also because the great numbers of Americans who have recently been abroad have brought back something of the European point of view.

Fifteen years ago the American public would not have been able to appreciate "The Marquis de Priola" as they can to-day. The character of the Marquis is the embodiment of the ruling class of central Europe before the war. This was the class that held the fate of Europe in the hollow of its hands. Some of the lines that Lavedan wrote a decade and a half ago now appear to have been truly prophetic.

When the young man whom the Marquis educated and who was really his natural son revolts against *De Priola's* base philosophy, he says: "You belong to an age when might was right, when dagger and poison were permitted by men and blessed by the Lord. You belong to an age that

is being fast swept out of existence. Soon it will be nothing but a hideous nightmare."

One of the points of the play that Mr. Ditrichstein regretted the failure of the critics to comment upon was the emphasis laid upon the high ideals of the Marquis's son, who declared that his peasant mother had instilled decent principles in his mind. The Marquis, with all his amazingly clever sophistry, could not destroy that early influence.

Several friends of Mr. Ditrichstein tried to dissuade him from producing this play, which has not registered such a pronounced success. One of these was his sister, who thought that he had played enough philanderers and that the Marquis was the worst of all because the others had been lovable, whereas the Marquis was a thorough villain. On this advice, Mr. Ditrichstein abandoned the project and forfeited the first royalties, which he had already paid.

Last fall he was on the point of relinquishing the rights a second time when he met a critic who had seen the play in Paris. This man, in fact, had seen the performance of *Le Bary* as the Marquis three times, and he said to Ditrichstein that he never should forget it as long as he lived. This was the sort of testimonial that meant something. Mr. Ditrichstein was declared that it was perfectly wonderful the way he got it over. There was only a moment in the last act when she had any doubts, and this was followed immediately by the terrific finale, which was so compelling that it obliterated all other impressions.

The cleverness with which the play was written Mr. Ditrichstein pointed out the skill with which the Marquis gauges each of the women to whom he makes love and employs the means that will be the most effective with her. In the case of his former wife, the Marquis appeals to her sentiment, approaching her with an air of humiliation and pretending that he has changed. With Mme. de Valder he resorts to badinage and shows that he can beat her at her own game. With Mme. Savieres he is like a cat. He first knocks away every prop on which she might rely and leaves her helpless. An accident has put in his possession information that makes her believe that he has loved her for years. He knows also that she has nothing in common with her husband. The preparation for this was particularly deft, requiring scarcely four lines in the early part of the third act, but the audience is fully aware of the breach between Mme. Savieres and her husband when the Marquis makes use of the point with a quick and graphic touch.

Mme. Savieres had set a trap for the Marquis, but she was caught in his counter snare. All that saved her was the presence of the Marquis's former wife, listening behind the door. Mme. de Chesne enters and at last the Marquis is in reality profoundly humiliated. It is the beginning of his breakup, which culminates in the scene with his son when he is seized with a stroke of apoplexy.

This final act of the play puts a heavy strain on the actor. During the first week of the engagement he never took a nervous pill because he simply could not get up from the floor. He declares that nobody could play such a thing through a whole season. *Le Bary*, who appeared in the play only three times a week at the

Comedie Francaise, used to sit in his dressing room for three-quarters of an hour before he could change his clothes. Mr. Ditrichstein when he first heard this scoffed at the idea, but now he fully believes it. The effectiveness with which Mr. Ditrichstein portrays this seizure is one of the things to be seen in the theatre of to-day.

**A CHANGE IN VALDAR.**

WHEN Emmett Corrigan assumed the role of Valdar, the mysterious butler of "Three Faces East," he declared that in all his thirty years experience as an actor this was the most difficult part he had ever been called upon to play. And since Mr. Corrigan has essayed practically every Shakespearean role, has been hero or villain of nearly every modern melodrama and more lately the leading figure of many domestic dramas, the preeminent difficulty of Valdar is interesting.

"Many playgoers," observed Mr. Corrigan, "don't understand why, in war time, Valdar might tax the limit of an actor's art. The role was so loathsome, yet withal so plausible, that Valdar took on the deadly realism of a character in *Balzac* or in *Zola*. I knew, our audiences knew, that there were in England at that very time a hundred, even several hundred Valdars—perhaps not as powerful but exactly as nefarious."

"Now it may be the business of an actor impersonating a villain to work for the hatred of his audience, but there is a difference in hatred. Playgoers hate the villain of a melodrama—playfully. But Valdar of 'Three Faces East' inspired fear in their hearts—and this is genuine hatred. That public feeling ran so high it would take very little to influence an audience to action against Valdar. And while on most occasions an actor might rejoice over such a subtle compliment to his art, in this case it was anything but gratifying. The situation was quite outside the theatre. It was not a matter between audience and actor; it was between the American people and enemy spies."

"My own feelings during the critical days of the war were anything but comfortable as I approached Valdar every night. Of course I had been too long an actor and had played too many villains of every stripe, from thief and murderer, to a squeaking or a prude in my work. The actor's art is portraying human emotions which are not necessarily his own. But through the long weeks when there was never a word or sign from his own son, stationed in the dangerous waters of the Mediterranean, Valdar's emotions were exceedingly difficult to portray. Even the patriotic side, of driving home the despicable traits of such a character, lost its appeal. If ever a stage role became a living thing of leathery to an actor Valdar became that to me. He was heinous."

"Then peace was declared, and with it came a pall of gloom over Valdar's power. The attitude of the audience changed on the very night of the peace news. They no longer regarded Valdar with dread. He was now only a historical puppet, to be squeaked or a prude in my work. Valdar's emotions were exceedingly difficult to portray. Even the patriotic side, of driving home the despicable traits of such a character, lost its appeal. If ever a stage role became a living thing of leathery to an actor Valdar became that to me. He was heinous."

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**PLAYS THAT LAST.**

Astor, "East Is West"; Belmont, "Tiger! Tiger!"; Belmont, "The Little Brother"; Bijou, "Sleeping Partners"; Booth, "The Woman in Room 13"; Broadway, "The Melting of Molly"; Casino, "Some Time"; Central, "Somebody's Sweetheart"; Cohan, "A Prince There Was"; Cohan & Harris, "Three Faces East"; Cort, "The Better Ole"; Criterion, "Three Wise Fools"; Eltinge, "Up in Mabel's Room"; Empire, "Dear Brutus"; Forty-fourth Street, "Sinbad"; Fulton, "The Riddle Woman"; Gaiety, "Lightnin'"; Globe, "The Canary"; Harris, "The Invisible Foe"; Henry Miller's, Mrs. Fiske; Hudson, "Friendly Enemies"; Knickerbocker, "Listen, Lester"; Longacre, Marie Cahill; Lyceum, "Daddies"; Lyric, "The Unknown Purple"; Maxine Elliott's, "Tea for Three"; New Rochelle, "Cappy Ricks"; New Amsterdam, "The Velvet Lady"; New Amsterdam Playhouse, "Combination Frolic"; Nora Bayes, "Ladies First"; Playhouse, "Forever After"; Plymouth, "Redemption"; Princess, "Oh, My Dear!"; Punch and Judy, Portmanteau Plays; Republic, "Roads of Destiny"; Selwyn, "The Crowded Hour"; Shubert, "Good Morning, Judge"; Thirty-ninth Street, "Keep It to Yourself"; Vanderbilt, "The Little Journey."

The armistice was signed, the audience of "Three Faces East" had turned a trick upon me. It is scarcely easier now to unfold Valdar's machinations to them than it was in war days. What opprobrium they once heaped upon him through fear they now heap in ridicule. If I'm not awfully mistaken, the worst of all—careful of each line, each gesture, each inflection, my playgoers will laugh at poor Valdar. For he is a poor pitiable wretch—a man whose life mission was to destroy the British Cabinet, and who described America's fighting force as "a bunch of fools." The future of all his threats, seems in the light of recent history almost funny. At least some playgoers regard him with a sort of grim humor.

"Now during my career I have often played sentimental heroes at whom certain stolid ones in my audience chose to sneer. It was hard, very hard to be laughed at. An actor prefers anything to this; it seems to challenge his right on the stage. Consider, then, the present case of Valdar. It is precarious and beset with hazards. A curse on the fellow, in peace or in war he finds us giving me a bad time of it!"

The French Theatre du Vieux Colomier announces a revival of Maitrelinck's "Peliss and Melisande," which is more faithful to American eye-gazers than playgoers. Maitrelinck has often been spoken of by critics as the greatest living poet of love, and although he has written many love dramas, "Peliss and Melisande" is universally recognized as his most poetical and beautiful. The first English production here of the play was given by the English actress, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, in 1902. Jean Kaimment will play *Peliss*, Suzanne Bitt Melisande and Robert Bogart Gold, while Valentine Tessler will be General, and Lucienne Rosemont the first maid servant.

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HAZEL DAWN  
IN "UP IN MABEL'S ROOM"



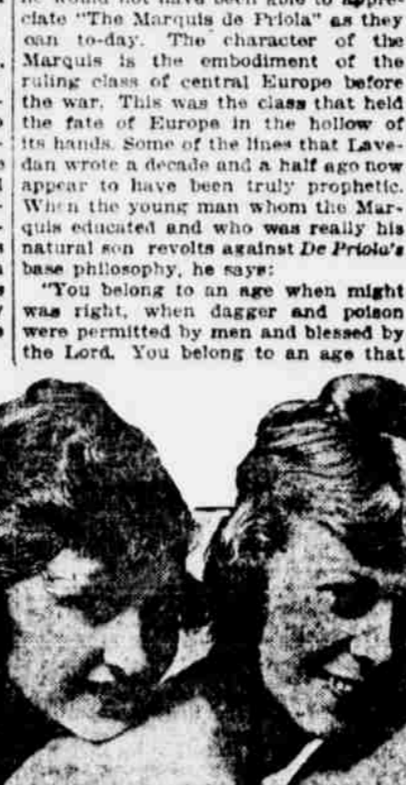
HELEN MENKEN  
IN "THREE WISE FOOLS"



JANET BEECHER  
IN "THE WOMAN IN ROOM 13"



EDITH TALIAFERRO  
IN "PLEASE GET MARRIED"



JANE COWL  
IN "THE CROWDED HOUR"



ADELAIDE  
IN "MONTE CRISTO, JR."



DORIS RANKIN  
IN "TOBY'S BOW"



LULU MCGUIRE  
IN "JUST ACROSS THE CORNER"



MAUDE HANFORD  
IN "REDEMPTION"



IN THE CHORUS OF "LISTEN, LESTER"